

# Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

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## **Comprehensive System of Personnel Development**

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (Division) has implemented a number of strategies to ensure trained staff is delivering quality services to applicants and consumers with whom division personnel work. Currently one employee is primarily responsible for activities related to the comprehensive system of personnel development. This employee is also responsible for other management duties in the designated state unit for delivery of services to individuals who are blind.

## **Data System**

The current system to collect and analyze data related to qualified personnel needs and personnel development consists of two components. The South Dakota Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) maintains a database of all training activities attended by Division staff including BHR training, seminars, workshops, conferences, and undergraduate and graduate level courses supported by the Division. Individual offices maintain files on educational backgrounds, training activities and goals and plans for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to meet the personnel standards to become qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and receive Commission of Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). Supervisors are required to address training needs as a part of the annual employee evaluation. Individual training needs are reported to the Training Officer to be considered in the implementation of results from the annual training needs assessment.

The Division utilizes a web based management information system (VR FACES) for data tracking of the CSPD for staff. The VR FACES tracks all the employees of the Division, their office structure, race, supervisor, disability, job classification, and other relevant information to the position. The system also tracks if VR Counselors are a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) or their development plan to become a CRC. Input of information is required of individual employees and supervisors with access to all information by the Training Officer and other management staff. This system is more efficient for addressing individual training needs as well as projecting for future personnel and training priorities and progress of staff toward meeting CSPD requirements. The following table identifies current staffing patterns for the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

<b>Type of Position</b>	<b>Total Positions FFY 2014 FTE</b>	<b>Current Vacancies</b>	<b>Projected Vacancies Over the next 5 years</b>
<b>Clerical</b>	10	0	3
<b>Counselor Aides</b>	5.75	0	1
<b>VR Counselors</b>	37.5	1	12
<b>Supervisors</b>	5	0	2

<b>Management</b>	7	0	2
<b>Other</b>	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	66.25	4	20

Current staffing patterns include the following: Clerical – Secretaries, Senior Secretaries and Administrative Assistants; Support - Counselor Aides; Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors - entry level VR counselors and senior level VR counselors; Supervisors - District Supervisors, Management – Division Director, Assistant Director, VR Specialist, IL Program Specialist, Rehabilitation Engineer and Deaf Services Specialist. The “Other” category refers to: Rehabilitation Teacher at the Yankton District Office and two Interpreters.

For FFY 2013, the ratio of counselors compared to applicants and eligible individuals served is an average 140 consumers per counselor. The remaining active caseload as of 10/01/2013 was an average of 63 active consumers per caseload. The changes in the caseload size are typically impacted by the changes in the economy and unemployment rates. It is the goal of the Division of Rehabilitation Services to remain under the ratio of 1:80 active consumers per counselor. The Division evaluates the need for a position before replacing it. In previous years, vacant positions have been relocated to other parts of the state with more need or change to a different position type as needed.

### **Personnel Standards**

Working in conjunction with the Bureau of Human Resources, the Division has established minimum standards for vocational rehabilitation counselors, senior vocational rehabilitation counselors and district supervisors. These standards are reviewed periodically in light of changing personnel needs, labor market supply and training resources. The Division relies on state standards for secretary, counselor aide and program administrator positions. These are generic job classifications within the state Bureau of Human Resources system. The Division has established specific knowledge, skills and ability requirements in order for individuals to enter these positions.

Newly hired rehabilitation counselors are required to have a degree that will lead towards CRC certification or, if they possess only a bachelor degree, must agree to pursue a master’s degree as a condition of employment. The Division will support costs associated with pursuit of master’s degrees. Funds for supporting employees’ pursuit of master’s level degrees consist of RSA stipends, in-service training money and program 110 funds. Senior rehabilitation counselors are certified through the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor process. The priority in filling counselor vacancies is a masters and CRC certification. Eligibility for CRC certification (already possesses a master’s degree but no certification) is the next preferred option. Due mostly to lower starting salaries compared to surrounding states, it is necessary to hire individuals with bachelor's degrees for entry-level positions and require they become qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors within eight years. Based on this requirement, a VR Counselor hired in 2014 will meet the qualified VR counselor standards in 2022. It is anticipated that all VR Counselors will have their CRC certification by 10/1/2022.

#### **Standards for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:**

Newly hired rehabilitation counselors are required to have a master’s degree that will lead towards CRC certification or if they possess only a bachelor degree, each new hire must agree to pursue a master’s

degree as a condition of employment. The Division does support costs associated with pursuit of master's degrees. Funds for support of employees to obtain a master's degree consists of RSA stipends, in-service training money and program 110 funds. Once entry level counselors have accomplished obtaining a master's degree and CRC certification, they can request a promotion to Senior Rehabilitation Counselor.

Standards for Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) by the Commission of Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) and they have demonstrated the ability to work independently in developing Individual Plans for Employment.

Standards for District Supervisors:

Currently all District Supervisors meet the requirements for a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Meeting this standard is preferred but not required for a District Supervisor. District Supervisors must have experience in working with people with disabilities, knowledge of the vocational rehabilitation program, and must have the ability to manage a budget, personnel and office operations. If the District Supervisor does not have the credentials of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), then a timeline will be established to obtain the CRC.

The Rehabilitation Act as amended and the Vocational Rehabilitation regulations refer to personnel as "Qualified Personnel" and "Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors". The Division has defined these positions as follows:

Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:

All Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, District Supervisors and State Office Personnel

- a. meets the standards for Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor;
- b. meets the standards for Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor except is not CRC certified;  
or
- c. meets the standards for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; has been employed by the Division as a VR Counselor for a minimum of six months; and has an approved plan to be eligible to take the CRC certification test by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification in eight years. (This employee does receive oversight and monitoring of the non-delegated functions of the VR process.)

The approved plan must be signed by the Supervisor. The plan will include at a minimum one course each semester unless the individual can present extenuating circumstances that are approved by the State Office.

As of 10/1/2013, 10 VR Counselors are in a plan for CRC with 4 of them able to take the CRC examination. 27 VR Counselors are Senior VR Counselors and have their CRC. One individual does not currently meet the standard of a qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and does not perform the non-delegable functions.

### Qualified Personnel:

This category of individuals includes all 6 Counselor Aides and one VR Counselor who are not "Qualified VR Counselors".

### Staff Development

The Division is committed to assist vocational rehabilitation counselors to obtain the necessary academic training and professional experience to meet the standards of a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. During FFY 2013, 11 Division employees were pursuing their Vocational Rehabilitation master's degree program through Montana State University, South Dakota State University or Virginia Commonwealth University. Seven individuals graduated during the past year with a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation. Another important strategy is coordination of resources to access the most comprehensive training opportunities. Resources include in-service training, TACE sponsored training, cooperation for training sponsored by other organizations. The last element of this plan is the development of a career ladder that will reward staff for professional development.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services approaches personnel development through a number of avenues. Each employee's current level of education and training, as well as short term and long term training needs are tracked by supervisors who evaluate methods for addressing these needs annually through the Performance Planning and Review System (PPAR). Individual training needs assessments are conducted to evaluate current levels of education, understanding of fundamentals of vocational rehabilitation, disability-related issues, professional development and related topics. Self evaluation and supervisor input and recommendation sections on the PPAR assist in assessing needs for training which may be pursued through a number of approaches. The results of the assessments are recorded for individuals, groups of related positions (i.e. rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, managers, clerical etc.) and for the agency as a whole.

The state's in-service plan and annual updates outline the strategies that the Division has developed to meet the professional or paraprofessional training needs of staff that includes specific training related to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology. This training is delivered through workshops, conferences, video conferencing, and webinars. The Division also utilizes e-mail and web links to disseminate information on research, studies and other relevant information related to disabilities and vocational rehabilitation.

The PPAR system allows for ongoing feedback between employees and supervisors by incorporating a self audit while addressing professionalism, work quality and areas for development as well as areas of strength. Training needs are addressed utilizing a form that not only identifies needed training, but also includes fields for the date the training is scheduled and the date it is attended. BHR workshops are identified under the following headings: supervisory, job enrichment and technology with "other training" and "job-specific skills" included in the document used to track need and attendance. The training officer works with agency supervisors to identify resources for obtaining training in areas related to vocational rehabilitation (including the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, Workforce Investment Act and RSA regulations), including serving individuals with the most significant disabilities and those of minority backgrounds. Training needs are also identified through input from consumers responding to satisfaction surveys and input from the State Rehabilitation Council.

Cooperation with other entities in state government such as the Department of Labor and Regulation (DOLR), Department of Health and the Department of Education, ensures that training opportunities are available which address topics relevant to the field of rehabilitation. Staff has access to intensive training which applies to serving individuals with disabilities. These conferences and/or seminars are also an opportunity to collaborate with other entities who deliver services to individuals with disabilities. In addition, vocational rehabilitation personnel regularly provide training concerning considerations when working with individuals with disabilities to DOLR employees. Paraprofessional staff (i.e. counselor aides and clerical staff) are offered ongoing training in word processing, other software applications and office related courses such as effective writing, organization skills, etc., through the Bureau of Human Resources. Courses specific to the vocational rehabilitation management information system and requirements specific to vocational rehabilitation staff are offered through in-service training sessions usually provided by agency specialty staff.

Leadership development and capacity building are addressed through distance learning courses as well as agency sponsored training sessions. Assistive technology training is available through DakotaLink (state's assistive technology project), the Division's Rehabilitation Engineer or the State Bureau of Information and Technology (for employees with disabilities who utilize assistive technology on the job). Annual training conferences and monthly video conferences address policy changes or training needs that have been identified in the annual training needs assessment. Cooperative agreements are in place with the state's four Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Projects and the Native American Center for Independent Living to provide training to staff on cultural diversity.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services implemented a new project in FFY 2008 called "Futures Initiative". The purpose of the Futures Initiative is to challenge Division employees in becoming positive forces of change in the field of Vocational Rehabilitation by adopting and implementing exemplary leadership practices. Division staff will have the opportunity to become part of the Futures Initiative to expand their knowledge, skills and abilities by participating in quality training and program development to become exemplary leaders. The Futures Initiative is designed for Division staff interested in moving into a new, different or expanded role within the Vocational Rehabilitation program. This may include staff who would be interested in mentoring new staff, moving into management positions and/or expanding their leadership skills and roles.

## **Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors**

The South Dakota Bureau of Human Resources did a Workforce Planning Study with SFY 2005 – SFY 2010 data compiling information for the past 5 years. Following are some results of the Department of Human Services (excluding the institutions). In 5 years, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have a 5.5% turnover rate per year. The State average of turnover rates is 12.2% and the Department of Human Service average turn over rate is 13.8 % per year. Two of the five Division supervisors have retired in the past 6 years. It is anticipated that all 4 of the 5 District Supervisors could retire in the current year. The average length of employment of the 5 District Supervisors is over 25 years.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services anticipates the need to recruit at least 12 Qualified VR Counselors in the next five-year period. This includes vacancies for five vocational rehabilitation counselors who are eligible for retirement in the next five years. Only one post-secondary institution

offers a master degree in rehabilitation counseling in South Dakota. South Dakota State University, in Brookings, SD began this program in the fall of 2005 with the first graduate in the fall of 2007. Currently 15 students are enrolled in the master program with ten enrolled with RSA funds. Seven students graduated in May 2013 and all were sponsored by RSA funds. During 2013, the South Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation Programs hired two of their students. The Division has a cooperative agreement with SDSU in providing internship opportunities, participation on their advisory board and recruitment of qualified candidates. The Division has been providing paid internship opportunities for students pursuing their master's degree in Vocational Rehabilitation. The Division also offers unpaid internship opportunities for students with other degrees when our offices have space available. The Division works cooperatively with the South Dakota State University in providing professional educational career tracks for individuals with disabilities. Some of these interns are recipients of the State Vocational Rehabilitation Program needing the internship as part of their Individual Plan for Employment.

Institution	Students Enrolled	Employees Sponsored by Agency or RSA	Graduates Sponsored by Agency or RSA	Graduates from Previous Year
South Dakota State University	15	10	7	7

Recruitment of qualified staff including individuals with minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities is accomplished through promoting vacancies at universities in Region VIII with master level programs. The University of Colorado, Montana State University, South Dakota State University and Utah State University are also sources for recruitment of graduates with master's level degrees in vocational rehabilitation counseling. In addition, South Dakota has three State public Universities with programs offering master degrees in counseling. These three State Universities have expanded their class locations to other universities and distance learning options. Graduates of the following programs are recruited for vocational rehabilitation counselor openings: Doctorate of Education program options, Counselor of Education and Counseling Practice; School Psychology and Educational Psychology, Mental Health Counseling, or Master of Arts in Counseling or Educational Psychology. Graduates are hired and trained to prepare for the CRCC to meet the highest qualifications in the state for rehabilitation counselors. During the next five years, it is projected that up to 6 counselors will be hired who are graduates of these programs.

The announcements for all state positions including the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor positions are posted on the State web page. The Division forwards the job openings to the South Dakota professional organizations such as the South Dakota RehabACTion Association. The announcement is also sent to consumer organizations such as the South Dakota Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities.

Retention and advancement are accomplished through the opportunity for all entry-level vocational rehabilitation counselors to participate in masters level vocational rehabilitation education programs and, once meeting the requirements for "Senior Counselor", receive promotion to this level. Leadership and management training and assignments with senior level management teams assist counselors to prepare for supervisory and administrative positions. Senior rehabilitation counselors are encouraged to apply for management and administrative positions when vacancies occur. Opportunities for promotion are available through announcements of supervisory and management positions provided those candidates meet the requirements for the position.

To address the priority of recruiting individuals with disabilities, the South Dakota Bureau of Human Resources has in SD Administrative Rule the requirement that individuals with disabilities are automatically certified applicants to be interviewed. In addition, any eligible applicant for employment who has been certified severely disabled by a rehabilitation counselor will be certified (eligible to interview) regardless of the ranking the applicant receives compared to other applicants. This ensures individuals who have disabilities have the opportunity to interview and compete for openings in the designated state unit.

### **Communication with Diverse Populations**

Interpreters are available for all training sessions to consumers who are deaf or deaf/blind. The Division employs sign language interpreters to be available to vocational rehabilitation consumers and staff. If additional interpreters are needed, the Division contracts for these services. Braille, materials on disk and enlarged print are provided to all staff or consumers who request alternative formats. The Division has developed fee schedules and vendors to pay for interpreters of foreign languages and Native American interpreters. The Division also utilizes foreign language interpreting services such as Interpretalk service for interpreting services through phone services.

### **Coordination of the CSPD and In-service Training**

Training on IDEA and transition services for students with disabilities is coordinated with the SD Department of Education/Special Education Program and the State Transition Project. The annual Youth Leadership Forum is planned in collaboration with the Special Education Program, Rehabilitation Services, Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, Statewide Independent Living Council, and the Transition Project. The 2011, 2012 and 2013 Fall Conferences were a combined effort with the Special Education Program and it offered a series of transition presentations.

The Division has established liaison relationships and cooperative agreements with the other partner agencies that are included in the Workforce Investment Act and the State Unified Plan. The training officer is on a work group with other agency's training officers to plan joint training initiatives. The Director of the Division of Rehabilitation Services as a member of the state's Workforce Investment Council deals with training issues system wide.

Training needs of the state's Native American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Programs, Centers for Independent Living, the Client Assistance Program and Community Based Rehabilitation Programs are also gathered and reported to the Region VIII TACE and considered in planning annual training activities. As previously stated, training needs are addressed through a variety of resources. In-service training, activities supported by the Region VIII TACE, workshops, conferences and seminars hosted by other organizations such as Special Education, Department of Labor, Parent Connection, Bureau of Human Resources training, professional organizations, consumer organizations (SD Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, SD Association of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind of SD, Community Support Providers of South Dakota and the SD Association of the Deaf), and distance learning are examples of sponsors of training activities in which staff participate. Independent study and mentoring by supervisors and senior rehabilitation counselors are other means for meeting individual staff development needs.

### **State Rehabilitation Council**

The State Rehabilitation Council (Board of Vocational Rehabilitation) is included in the preparation and writing of the state plan and related policies and procedures. The Board is consulted in the development of the plan and has the opportunity to review and provide input into the draft pre print and attachments prior to submission to RSA. In addition, Board members participate in and assist with facilitation of annual public meetings. Results from the statewide training needs assessments will be shared with the Board at future meetings for their input and advice. Board members are invited to agency training sessions and conferences and they are encouraged to attend other training events appropriate to the vocational rehabilitation arena.